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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the increasing number of teenagers who are dually diagnosed with both learning disabilities and substance abuse and are not receiving appropriate treatment to deal with their special needs. It reports the outcomes of a phenomenological analysis of six young adults who discussed their problems with drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment or underemployment, their dreams of success, and their worries about the future. The participants came from a variety of familial backgrounds with varying socioeconomic status and had experienced stressful events and catastrophic life happenings. Each individual continues to struggle with problems with alcohol and drug addiction and with living with a disability. The report concludes that: (1) for transition to be successful for students with learning disabilities, personnel involved with the process must collaborate and understand the other's role within the model program; (2) vocational training emphasis should be placed on enhancing skills learned by students; and (3) it is critical for the schools to adapt their programs of study to guarantee that every student who enters the school will leave that school with employable skills. (Contains 44 references.) (CR)

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Vanishing Hopes and Dreams: Which Comes First? Addictions or Problems.

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Abstract

Adolescent drug and alcohol addiction coupled with learning disabilities has been in the spotlight for several years now. The last twenty years has witnessed an increased number of teenagers who are dually diagnosed with both learning disabilities and substance abuse and not receiving appropriate treatment to deal differently with their special needs. Along with these maladies there are often other difficulties which are also present. Just a few of the difficulties that usually arise from being addicted to drugs and learning disabled are the inability to maintain adequate time on a job, being welfare recipients, being homelessness, becoming unwed mothers, and witnessing or being victims of family violence. Often, individuals seek their own answers to never ending questions well into their golden years. Having a disability implies a reduction in function that may influence the outcomes of people for a lifetime. Thus, this study is a phenomenological analysis of six young adults who have discussed their own problems with drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment or underemployment, their dreams of success, and their worries about the future. The participants came from a variety of familial backgrounds with varying degrees of socio-economical status. While some are still chronologically young, these individuals have already experienced stressful events and catastrophic life happenings, which often happen to young adults with disabilities. Each individual within this study continues to struggle with their own disabilities, their own problems with alcohol and drug addiction, and their own experiences with the pitfalls of societal misfortune of living with a disability.

EC 307534

Vanishing Hopes and Dreams:

Which Comes First? Addictions or Problems

Every day we see students who occupy the seats in many junior high and high school special education classrooms. These students often seem to be experiencing anxieties, but none that can be considered any different from any other teen-aged youth. The boys will talk about girls and why they cannot get dates. The girls capture each other's attention by mentioning a boy's name that they all think they love madly. Nothing out of the ordinary, or so it seems at the time.

What we know about these youths and what they themselves seem to not know is that, beyond the years of junior and senior high class discussions of who likes who, these youths will soon, within a span of four or five years, find themselves out in the real world. This will have a different meaning for different students. For the youth with mild and moderate disabilities who have learned well-defined accommodation skills, it might possibly mean going on to post secondary school for a degree in an academic subject. Not only have these few youths learned how to make modifications in their learning styles and acquire other methods for coping with their disability; strong and powerful parental support and parental involvement also strengthen them. Studies abound with conclusions that parental involvement is beneficial to student achievement in school (Epstein, 1991; Henderson, 1987; Liontos, 1992;Walberg, 1992). For the

young adults who have not made adequate accommodations for their disabilities, they will be facing outcomes that categorize them in the ranks of unemployed or under-employed youths in the United States.

The majority of youths with disabilities will be faced with many trials and tribulations in their lives. Many of these difficulties co-mingle with the fact that these youths are with disabilities and also are unable to stay employed, or are underemployed. Literature also states that another facet to the problem is that many of these individuals are dually diagnosed as learning disabled and also alcoholic/addicts.

In other literature, data show that people with disabilities are at much higher risk than the rest of the population for substance abuse. In 1997 statistics showing that of 248,679 clients served by licensed substance abuse facilities in New York State, 55,719 (22.4 percent) were reported to the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services as having a coexisting physical or mental disability. Of those clients with disabilities, approximately 40% percent suffer from disabilities such as learning disabilities and/or attention problems (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services [SAMHSA], 1999).

In the last two decades, much has been written about the problems encountered by people with disabilities who are entering society. Frequent problems cited with this endeavor include barriers involving architecture, education, and vocation. Kinney and Leaton (1986) estimated that 77% of American men and 60% of American women drink alcohol. Using these statistics as baseline data, subsequent studies indicate the higher prevalence of alcohol and

drug use with persons with disabilities. The multi-disabled person, who was an alcoholic as well as having other physical or learning disabilities, was identified as an emerging problem (Hindman & Widem, 1980).

According to Kircus and Brillhart (1990) many persons with disabilities have a hidden disability: substance abuse involving alcohol and/or psychotropic drugs. Patterns of substance abuse behavior vary according to use before the disability, following the onset of the disability or both before and following the onset of disability. Substance abuse has a negative impact on a person's vocation, academic performance, family life, and social life, as well as on physical health.

Alcoholism often arises from the person with disabilities' need to distort an unpleasant reality (Vash, 1981). Rasmussen and DeBoer (1980-81) conducted a study in a vocational rehabilitation facility and found that 60% of the 273 clients had alcohol-related problems and 30% of the subjects of the study were classified as alcoholics.

So what happens to these youths that have learning disabilities, either diagnosed or undiscovered, and also a substance abuse problem? Do they fare well in the adult world? Do they grow up to be productive and useful citizens of society? We think not. Many become jobless and homeless. Some live within the extremes of poverty and dependence. In some cases, this socio-economic status does not improve. Nor does the employment picture. Halpern (1992) has established that work patterns that are set during adolescence are the work patterns that an individual will continue to reveal for a lifetime. Thus, many

individuals with disabilities often live out their lives in a viscous cycle of unemployment, substance abuse, poverty, and health problems.

METHOD

We constructed a phenomenological study to further investigate the postulated uniqueness and complexity of adolescents with mild disabilities and their plight in the job market, particularly the events catalyzing the work attainment process and early career-oriented years. Some of these individuals have experienced alcohol and/or drug abuse intertwined with their inability to sustain full-time employment. Several researchers (Haring, 1990; Frank & Sitlington, 1990 and 1996) have established survey instruments which could be quite helpful in deciding whether or not an individual with disabilities lives independently, pursues full-time employment, develop substance abuse difficulties or makes any number of other related decisions. Yet, there are other phenomenological studies such as Kircus and Brillhart (1990) that provide a most in depth understanding of the relatively new area of adolescence dependence on alcohol and drugs and the complex phenomena of work-related issues and employment degradation (Kurcus & Brillhart, 1990; Leone & Others, 1988;Li, Li & Ford, 1996).

To locate participants we talked to a number of career counselors and identified five young adults and one older adult of American descent (one female and five males) who ranged in age from twenty-three to fifty three. Five out of the youngest of the six had been identified as mild or moderately disabled in their preteen years and seemed to have been unable to build stable lives for themselves. One of the participants and the older adult male who agreed to be interviewed had

never been formally diagnosed with learning disabilities, even though they both had had trouble in academics. The older gentleman in the study has never been able to read or write anything beyond his own name. They all had at least five different jobs since leaving high school and the older gentleman has been incarcerated for 6 months on drug charges in Texas. All of the prospective participants, but one female, agreed to be interviewed, and she was the only one who was married and working.

In extensive individual interviews, the participants reconstructed their stories, leading up to their current level of acceptance of their lives as the "way it is". Many also are extending into their early identity struggles. We were confident in the trustworthiness of our data. Each participant came highly recommended from respected career and guidance counselors and substance-abuse counselors who had known the participants for a number of years. The participants were well known for their candor (Marshall, Marshall, & Heer, 1994). After transcribing our recorded interviews, to ensure anonymity and privacy, we renamed all of the people mentioned in our study. Clearly, several themes emerged. Before discussing their importance in relation to the current literature on adolescent with dual diagnosis and employment issues, we offer short summaries of each life that unfolded before us.

THE PARTICIPANTS:

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

JERRY

Jerry and his parents are long-time residents of a small town south of Houston Texas. He was diagnosed as learning disabled when he was in sixth grade. He made passing grades in high school and had hopes of being a forest

ranger. As Jerry tells his interview, he speaks with a smile yet his head is down. His voice is low yet has glimmers of hope within. Jerry has had problems with alcohol since he was 14 years old. He will tell you that he has several DUI (driving under the influence) charges against him but he insists that he does not have a drinking problem. Jerry stated that his parents are confused and frustrated with his behaviors including his inability to hold a job. I have asked Jerry how he makes a living for himself:

> I draw an unemployment check when I'm not working construction. I took metal shop in high school and I went to the community college for a couple of semesters. I learned about millwright work. But sometimes the jobs don't last long and so I go back and apply for unemployment. I usually get some help from Salvation Army or the government cheese or butter. I go to thrift stores to buy jeans and winter apparel.

While Jerry collects unemployment insurance, he supplements his checks with a favorite hobby of hunting and trapping and selling some of his captures to local fur buyers. The total earnings from these exchanges usually do not amount to much more than what was spent to kill the animals. Jerry never has any extra spending money; probably because he works for minimum wage only, which affords little of the known luxuries in life.

Other research reveals that despite wage advances, the median hourly wage for adolescents with learning disabilities still was just at $5.72 in 1990, representing an annual income of less than $12,000 for youths with disabilities who were employed full-time and year round. For individuals employed part

time, which is most often the case; this figure is even lower. Moreover, about 60% of working youths received medical insurance benefits or paid vacation. These benefits were much more common among those who worked full-time or worked for higher wages. With such staggering figures, employers and educators concerned with the vocational aspects of these youths seek ways to improve the chances of these individuals getting better jobs (Wagner, Blackorby, Hebbeler, & Newman, 1993).

Jerry's work pattern is to work long enough at a construction job to qualify for unemployment insurance and then quit or take voluntary reduction of staff cut backs. This entitles him to receive unemployment compensation for a period of time. When the unemployment money has expired or has been depleted, he goes back to work in which after an unknown period of time, usually brief, he is laid off again and he is back at the unemployment office, filing for unemployment insurance. Research suggests that early employment experiences can be influential in the success that youth with disabilities ultimately achieve in the labor market. Further, early work experiences can also influence work-related behaviors that may stay with people throughout their working lives (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Jerry is in his middle twenties, unmarried and has no real future plans in sight.

> "I had a nice girlfriend for three years but she recently decided to not be involved with me. She said I had no future and was always broke."

The cycle of temporary work, collect unemployment, and receive government aid is one all too often familiar to post-secondary high school students with learning

disabilities. Approximately eight out of every ten able-bodied working age Americans have a job, but only one out of every ten Americans with a learning disability is considered a full-time employee (Woodard, 1993). With such disproportionate ratios, it is probably correct to contend that citizens with LD comprise a large part of the unemployed in the country. Whether or not this is a life-style of choice is not the issue here, but rather if students such as the one in the scenario above would have a better quality of life, as described by some researchers (e.g. Esgrow, 1978; Halpern, 1992; Okolo & Sitlington, 1988) if better transition services in high school were provided to students with learning disabilities. The findings of the current interview are similar to those expressed in a recent report entitled, "National Longitudinal Transition Study", generated by Blackorby et.al (1996) discussing the findings relevant to the world of work and how students with disabilities fuse into the real world after leaving high school. Given that the early years after high school have been described as a floundering period for many youth (Halpern, 1992), a view past the first few post-school years is essential to have an accurate picture of youth accomplishments. Although success in employment does not necessarily correlate with success in other facets of life (Halpern, 1985), it clearly is a major factor of youths' chances to achieve economic and residential independence.

CHRISTY

Christy is a young woman in the eighth grade in 1993. She was labeled as learning disabled and somewhat withdrawn. In addition to cognitive delays, Christy also suffered from several physical maladies which seemed to create some

minor disturbances in the learning and social process. She, since birth, had become constantly burdened with a moderately severe skin disease, which caused her skin to be chronically irritated and scaly. As a result, throughout the class period, Christy would scratch and claw at her arms or legs. She had female problems by which at the age of 18 she received a hysterectomy because the doctor had warned her that, because of her illness childbirth could be fatal. Even though Christy had a loving and caring mother, she did not have the educational background to continue to post secondary education. Christy had her first contact with marijuana when she was in the eighth grade. While in junior high, she and some of her friends would sneak off at lunch and smoke pot. They would then come back to class and finish out the day. When Christy graduated from high school in 1996, she went to work for a fast-food restaurant. She continued to smoke marijuana for some time. She stated that she still drinks alcohol on occasion. Christy expressed satisfaction with some aspects of her job, yet disappointment too:

> Since high school, I have worked in several service jobs. I was in a few vocational classes in high school and really learned a lot from them. I especially enjoyed the health care profession where I worked as nurses' aide in a home for elderly people and also for old people with crippling diseases. The pay was not enough for me to move out on my own. I lived with a girlfriend for awhile but I didn't want that either. Then I moved in with my boyfriend for a couple of months but decided that I didn't love him, so I moved out. Right now, (pause), I'm back at home

with my parents. I get depressed a lot. Sometimes when I get down I get in my car and drive. I just drive to wherever until whenever. It may be 3:00 am when I finally go home. I want to do something with my life but I don't know what. One day I would like to be a teacher. I'm good with kids and I could teach them a lot.

Christy's story substantiates research that elaborates on the effects of unemployment and/or underemployment on an individual's mental and physical health. A large number of studies have shown that the unemployed or underemployed are less healthy, both physically and psychologically, than the employed (e.g.; Kessler, House, & Turner, 1985; Mastekaasa, 1996; Price, B., 1995; Warr, Jackson & Banks, 1988). This interview also reveals Christy's desires as a young woman who wants to have a success story rather than to continue the stream of failures she has already encountered in her youthful life.

JESSE

Jesse graduated in 1992 from a high school in a rural southern Texas town. He had been in special education resource classes from grades 8 through 12. His mother, being a special education teacher in a nearby district, was distraught and afraid that Jesse couldn't do the work in a regular class. He was failing several core subjects and began missing school frequently. Upon testing, Jesse was found to have a learning disability in written and oral expression. It was upon the parent's request that Jesse be placed in special education classes. Jesse enlisted in the armed services after graduation. He stayed six months at a basic training facility in San Antonio Texas. He said that this is where he learned how to drink

and do crack. Since graduation, Jesse has spent the last 6 years being unemployed or under-employed.

> Well, what can I say? I'm 25 years old and I'm bored to death with life. I get up every morning and feed my dogs. Then I go check my hog traps and trotlines that I've got set out on the river. I've been selling fish and wild game meat to restaurants and buyers who purchase the meat for resale to businesses around the area. I have tried to work at different jobs. Once I had a job loading hay and baling hay. But that is seasonal and not very steady. I tried to get on as a truck driver for a local delivery company but they wouldn't hire me because of my reading and writing skills. I also did not have any type of computer skills. I hate computers. So, they didn't hire me. I'm so fed up with trying to get a decent job. I would like to make good money, but they all tell me that I have to start at the bottom and work my way up to the top. That's baloney! I'm not going to do that. If I can't make at least $10.00 per hour, then I just won't work. I'll just keep living here with my mother.

Constant failure by students with learning disabilities creates barriers for the students that often are too difficult to ever tear down. Research shows that persistent failure and frustration is a significant deterrent to motivation (Ford & Dineen, 1984). Moreover, in a current article entitled, "Are Adolescents with Learning Disabilities Successfully Crossing the Bridge into Adult Life?" Sitlington and Frank (1990) focused on high school graduates who do not continue their formal education. The study investigated the adult adjustment of a

statewide random sample of 911 individuals labeled LD who had been graduated from school one year prior to the study. In the report, Sitlington and Frank (1990) provided information concerning the efforts to improve educational arrangements for the transition of high school graduates with exceptionalities from school to work. Authors noted that the individuals in the study were only employable at a half-time basis and at entry or minimum wage levels. Moreover, these individuals frequently received little vocational counseling in high school. While there has been suggestions by Halpern (1992) expressing concerns about the narrow manner of community adjustment have been structured in follow-up studies of former special education students, secondary schools still have difficulties giving useful and productive instruction for students to succeed in the world of work. In another report Barton (1990) illuminates the idea that transition for many students to the world of work is often left unaided and "left to chance" (p.6). Barton (1990) focused on five main aspects of the transition of these individuals into the workforce. He highlighted the differences between classroom skills and work-place skills by pointing out that although many students are prepared in terms of the secondary school curriculum, those skills mastered by high school students are not ones deemed desirable by employers. On a similar vein, Rist (1981) suggested that most high school students who want to work immediately upon leaving high school receive little or no guidance. This fact was reinforced by Northruft (1990) who stated, "They are simply released to a labor market that has little to offer them and has little interest in what they learned in school" (p. 10).

SAM

At twenty-two, Sam stands a slim six feet four inches tall, but he still carries early memories of being overweight and larger than everyone. " I was the black sheep of the family and the ugliest…at least that's what everyone in the family said to me." He is the youngest of five siblings, and older sister and three older brothers. As a small child he felt isolated, lonely, and inferior to everyone. His parents divorced when he was one year old, and his mother soon remarried. When Sam was five years old he was molested by one of his stepfather's friends. At seven, his brothers introduced him to alcohol and soon to marijuana. "I liked the feeling that drugs gave me. I didn't feel like crap all the time, because they were always telling me what a piece of crap I was," he remembered. During his eighth grade year, Sam's stepfather, and mother told him that his stepfather was not his biological father. In the tenth grade, Sam's middle brother, who was also a teenager, began beating him regularly. This treatment finally ended, when Sam was able to stand up for himself when, "I got really tired of getting my ass kicked so I started fighting back, " Sam triumphantly explained.

Despite Sam's turbulent early life, he managed to do well in school in most of his subjects. All subjects were fairly good except for math. He was diagnosed with learning disabilities in the 6th grade, but it was apparent by this time that he was far behind his classmates in academic success. He had already deemed himself as a "failure". He played an instrument in the school band. While continuing to battle a food addiction, Sam found jobs during high school by playing in bands with some of his classmates. "This was the perfect opportunity

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to drink and do crank," stated Sam. "I could say I was working in all the bars, but what I was really doing was getting stoned." By the time Sam was sixteen, his need to use drugs and alcohol overcame his efforts to be apart of his schooling or his work. His life revolved around drinking and using drugs. He would pick up a few odd jobs here and there, playing in bars and clubs or running errands for different relatives whom would hire him. He spent most of his time being thrown out of his parent's house and trying to get back in. He had affairs with married women; was violent on two occasions toward other using females; had sex with two and three girls a day; sold and used drugs intravenously; and lived to attend one party after another.

Today, Sam lives in the poverty lines of welfare and handouts. He is no longer able to work and continues to strive for some type of inner peace. He continues to do odd jobs for relatives yet he still cannot keep a full time job for very long. Sam is no longer overweight. Apparently the drugs and alcohol use has dwindled him down to being "thin". Sam looks down at the groand when he speaks; "I don't know what I 'll do tomorrow.... Maybe I'll get a good job and settle down and get married." Could this be more of the vanishing dreams and hopes of individuals who are learning disabled and addicted to drugs as well? What happened to Sam first? Was it the disability or was it the addiction?

CHARLES

A big, but quiet, individual at 19, Charles reflects calmly on his troubled childhood. He was a middle child, with one younger sister and an older brother, born to upper-middle-class parents. Charles' mother and father argued constantly;

his mother had severe mental health problems; his father was a practicing alcoholic and Charles was always reticent and distant. Charles's father worked intermittently. He was always getting fired from the jobs because he could not make it to work on many days. Most days he was too hung over to go in to work. Charles would see his mother cry and scream and try to get his father to get up and go to work, but he continued to lay in bed with a sick headache. Charles's parents recognized that he was a troubled child and sent him to a psychologist when he was just a few years old. He could not get his schoolwork done on time. He was always behind in his work, even in the early years. But they divorced when he was five, and Charles would find his own means of dealing with himself.

He and his two siblings lived with their mother, who fell into the abyss of her own mental illness and periodically moved them from city to city or state to state for no apparent reason. Moreover, she began openly using marijuana. When Charles was eight, he had already attended 6 different schools and could barely spell his name. He could not read nor could he listen to stories being read aloud. When Charles was nine, he and his brother got drunk. Charles responded with extreme paranoia. Despite his fear, mind-altering substances soon became an avenue away from his turbulent home and toward oblivion. Later that year, Charles, and his brother smoked marijuana, and drug use became a part of his life.

When Charles was ten his brother went to live with their father, who had recently remarried. Two years later Charles joined him. By then, Charles was using drugs and alcohol to a progressive state and Charles' school attendance was sporadic. His grades were abysmal, and by the time Charles was fourteen, a

family psychiatrist told his father and stepmother that he was using drugs and alcohol heavily. They responded by sending him to an adolescent treatment center, but because they themselves used drugs and alcohol in front of him, he reasoned, "I thought they were singling me out and crucifying me". Thus, when his parents picked him up from treatment, they took him to their house and had a party. Due largely to lack of support, Charles started using drugs a couple of weeks later, and his father sent him to a military academy. By this time, his stepmother had some money put back. Charles remembers the experience very vividly:

> The one thing everybody out to know about military schools is everybody puts their troubled kids in them to straighten them out. All it really does is give the kids a chance to compare notes. I hated that place. There were some real wacko kids in there. I really learned how to use grass in that place and plus I didn't even have to work.

While Charles continued to use drugs and drink while in the academy, he continued to have some hope that someday things would get better for him. As a result of some family members who knew of Charles' dilemma, they took him into their home.

Today, Charles continues to have difficulties with reading and writing, yet he is working toward an associate's degree in welding technology. He attends a community college at night and works in a job-training program during the day. In this manner, he finds hope and some comfort to know that perhaps one day, he can live independently and have his own home. Charles lives with his aunt and

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uncle and depends on them for many of his everyday needs such as food, shelter, and transportation. He is humble and he knows the value of a dollar. He feels disgusted with his parents and with the school system for not having taken the time to place him in special classes where he could have had help with his academics when he was young. For Charles, there is hope. Why? Because he wants to do better. He has been given a choice as to what he wants to do and how. Conclusive evidence reveals that when given choices, or what is commonly called "self determination", students do much better (Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996) Charles said many times during the interview:

> "I wanted to be like the other kids...get my work done in class, get a good job, find a nice girl and settle down and get married....but it just hasn't happened for me".

According to Halpern (1994) students with disabilities have the same values and wants as students who have no disabilities. While Charles was never formally diagnosed with learning disabilities or other mental disabilities, his inability to read and write in a functional manner has always been a hindrance to his life. And while he wanted all of the things that would be called a "better quality of life", he fell short of ever obtaining them.

GARY

Our final interview for this study was with Gary. Gary is fifty-three years old and has been incarcerated for the past 6 months in the county jail in a rural town in south Texas. Our interview was twofold: some of the information came from Gary himself and some of the information was gathered from Gary's ex-

wife, who lived with him for 9 years in the late 1970's and early 80's. According to Bonnie, life with Gary was "pure hell". Bonnie goes on to add:

> We never had enough money to pay the bills. He was always getting angry with his bosses and quitting his jobs. I remember that he worked on one job for two years and that was the longest he had ever stayed with one company. Gary and I fought a lot about money. We never had any kids and I think the main reason was that I felt so insecure in our relationship. Nothing was ever permanent. I couldn't count on anything being there. Like, I never knew when he was gonna quit a job and so, I never knew when I would be able to pay the bills. The only reason we had a permanent place to live is because I worked full-time and paid the trailer payment and we lived on my mother's land. So, I knew that I'd always have a roof over my head. And by the time I married Gary, he was already a full-blown alcoholic. We would spend what little extra money we had in the bars on weekends. By the time I divorced him, I too, had become an alcoholic. I drank to numb out the pain of being with him. Fortunately, I was able to keep a job. Plus, I was a college graduate....I didn't have a learning disability like Gary did.

Gary was 27 years old when Bonnie married him. He had already been married once before and had two children, Laura and Lynn. Gary could not read or write. He had attended school until the eleventh grade and then quit to get married to Mildred, his first wife. According to Bonnie, Gary was a handsome man in his younger days. All of the girls in school thought he looked like James Dean.

Bonnie never understood how Gary could make it all the way to the eleventh grade and not know how to read or write. When talking with Gary, he began slowly with a slurred speech because he has front teeth missing and pronunciation of some words is difficult.

> Well, I don't know what you want to know except that I'm about to go stir-crazy in this jail cell. I'm in here for selling marijuana. I don't smoke it myself....I was just selling enough to pay my bills. I don't have a car because I can't get a driver's license. Oh, I could take an oral test, but I'm too embarrassed. I don't want to tell them that I can't read or write. I grew up and went to work out in the plants here in Texas. I learned on the job how to do insulation on pipes. In the seventies, that was good money. I would make sometimes about $15.00 per hour if I was on a union job in the plant. I was an industrial insulator until my lungs got bad with that asbestosis. Before I did that I worked as a longshoremen. That was dirty work. My clothes would smell like dead animals after working and unloading those barges coming into the Gulf of Mexico. I hated that job, but I stuck with it for about a year. I use to have my wives, either Mildred or Bonnie fill out all of my paperwork for me. They would fill out my applications for work, or my timesheets to get paid. And they were glad to do it. I guess they knew that if they didn't help me, I wouldn't get a paycheck for that week.

When asked about his drinking Gary laughs:

> I started drinking when I was about eleven years old. I would walk downtown to the pool hall and play pool and that's where I learned to drink. I guess I'm an alcoholic. Bonnie says I am. She tried to get me to go to Alcoholics Anonymous when we were married. I went for six months then when she left me anyway, I thought what the hell, and I started drinking again. I can go for long periods of time without drinking but though so I don't really think I am an alcoholic. Plus, I don't have to drink everyday. Like I said, I go for days without drinking even a can of beer. I try to stay off the hard stuff though because it makes me get into fights and I usually get my ass kicked.

Gary will come up for parole in about 6 months. He is waiting to go to trial and get his sentence. The police report stated that Gary had about $127.00 in his possession when he was arrested. He had about 3 ounces of marijuana in his home. He lived with his niece and was taken to jail from there. As evident, it would appear that Gary was not running a large dope ring. Instead, it looks as if he really was trying to make a living because he knows no other way. He cannot read or write. He has no transportation. Some final remarks from Gary were:

> I feel real helpless and defeated. I want out of this place but I have nowhere to go when I get out. They won't let me smoke a cigarette or nothing. I haven't seen daylight since I got here because if you go outside your prone to get into a fight. And I just don't won't any trouble. I'm in a cell with 20 other men and they pretty much leave me alone. I'm too old for them to have sex with and they don't hassle me about anything

else…except my food. They always want other inmate's food. No one has been to see me except Bonnie and I was ashamed for her to see me here. I still love her. I have never remarried and I probably never will. I just don't know what I'll do.

Conclusion

Authors of employment/life satisfaction status question the efficacy of whether students with learning disabilities are making a successful integration into adulthood. Some researchers believe the answer is "not as well as they could be". (Sitlington & Frank, 1990; Okolo & Sitlington, 1988; Halpern, 1992; Zigmond & Thorton, 1985; Hasazi, Gordon & Roe 1985). Although the employment rate for graduates with learning disabilities is respectable and almost all individuals who are employed are in competitive employment, still a high percentage of these individuals are in part-time employment with low-status occupations. High percentages are still living at home. In addition, the results for females are much more discouraging. The individuals in the study done by Sitlington & Frank (1990) were high functioning, as evidenced by intelligence scores, math scores, and reading test scores.

For some years, special educators have considered and discussed a number of concepts such as mainstreaming, non-categorical programming and resource rooms. The implications of these concepts for teacher education have also been examined (Blackhurst, Cross, Nelson, & Tawney, 1973; Reynolds, 1979). Within this framework, Hurley (1974) discusses four questions that need to be addressed in planning training programmes. One of these questions is "What are the areas

of knowledge with which the teacher must be equipped?" Hurley answers this question by discussing two broad areas of knowledge that he refers to as "supportive knowledge" and "content knowledge". Hurley offers the opinion that these knowledge areas are essential for all special education teachers.

According to DeFur and Taymans (1995) the intent of transition services is to enable young people with disabilities to become productive and independent members of society. However, the reality of this is that the transition initiative for many people with disabilities depends on the provision of effective services and service co-ordination. Simply put, in order for transition to be successful for students with learning disabilities, any personnel involved with the process such as pre-service teachers, teachers, vocational counselors, vocational teachers, and other support personnel must collaborate with each discipline and gain an understanding of the each other's role within the model programme.

The future demands for the work force and the community require people with skills of work competence, community participation, and self-advocacy (Halpern, 1992; U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). The new perspective must be student-centered within the community and employment context. Providing transition services that ensure the desired outcomes require that transition advocates plan services with the youth, the family, and the employers (DeFur & Taymans, 1995).

McCoy (1991) added that it is the responsibility of the schools to educate our children to be life-long learners who are both literate and employable.

Schools can and must teach the skills, attitudes, and understandings to ensure that these outcomes will happen (McCoy, 1991). Further, it is within the framework of vocational training that emphasis could be placed on enhancing skills learned by students, both disabled and non-disabled.

The obvious mission of any school program must be to prepare students upon graduation for the world of higher education or for the world of work recognizing that all students must be presented with the opportunities to develop the skills that have been noted in this section. It is of critical importance for the schools to adapt their programmes of study to guarantee that every student who enters our school will leave that school with employability skills (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1991).

Adapting programs from a vocational standpoint is crucial in that, according to the Wall Street Journal Reports (1990), jobs are becoming more demanding and complex. But our schools do not seem up to the task. They are producing students who lack the skills that businesses so desperately need to compete with non-disabled peers in today's global economy. In doing so, they are condemning students to a life devoid of any meaningful employment (1990, February).

According to Elksnin & Elksnin (1991), it is common knowledge that the demands of the work world are changing. By the year 2000 an increasing number of entry-level jobs will require the ability to conceptualize ideas, analyze and communicate well and apply effective problem-solving strategies to any given situation. Students with learning disabilities are to be prepared within this realm

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of job-related skills for them to be successful and competitive with their non-disabled peers (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1991). Yet, paradoxically, how to get along in job-related situations and make decisions is left out of many programs at the secondary school level.

The key to success in the work place for students with disabilities depends on the content of the curriculum provided and the quality of transitional services provided (Benz & Halpern, 1987). Special education as a field needs to examine its goals for all individuals, especially for those labeled learning disabled. The transition process involves three separate components: (a) the foundation, which is laid in the school years, (b) the end goal of community adjustment, which includes residential, employment, and social/interpersonal network components, and (c) the bridge between school and community adjustment (Sitlington & Frank, 1990). Further, the foundation we are laying for these students appears to be a shaky one. The effects of regular and specially designed vocational programs seem mixed; the only component that appears to have any positive effect on post-school employment is paid employment during high school.

As Okolo and Sitlington (1988) have indicated, special education and vocational training can play a critical role in the transition of individuals with learning disabilities from school to adult life. This role can include preparation on academic skills needed for specific occupations, instructions in social skills necessary for survival in the community and on the job, and support of the individual in general education and vocational education courses that provide specific skill training and paid employment experiences. Further, special

educators and vocational educators need to be involved in transition planning for this population so that the foundation laid can be stronger and more closely related to the student's goals in adult life and so that the individual does not have to cross the bridge alone (Okolo & Sitlington, 1988).

Experts in the field of transition (Okolo & Sitlington, 1988; Halpern, 1992; Halpern, 1985; Zigmond & Thornton, 1985; Elksnin & Elksnin, 1991; Esgrow, 1978) identify educators in our high schools as partial change agents for these students. Teachers are responsible for what the students learn and for what the student's experience both within the classroom and also outside of the classroom.

Whereas teachers are gaining in responsibilities for students' learning, the pre-service teacher is being held accountable for this knowledge to be imparted once a position is acquired. When PL 94-142 was re-authorized and renamed in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, this was followed by the concept of having students with disabilities placed in general education classrooms which also includes vocational classes. This concept has necessitated both knowledge and training in the area of what skills are necessary for making a successful transition from high school to work for all vocational teachers as well (Tomkins, 1996).

As an educator and concerned citizen, I believe that there are no easy answers to the nation's most productive commodity: our children's future. I do not advocate any form of programme where the main component is a "one size fits all" philosophy. As is illustrated in the lives of six of thousands of students

with learning disabilities, each life is different with different variables creating either havoc or contentment. As special educators and general educators, we must bridge the gap between unemployment and unfulfilled lives of youths with learning disabilities and find ways to ensure more viable solutions to the problems they encounter on a daily basis.

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